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ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes impediments to implementation of instructional technology (IT) initiatives as seen by a faculty member who has actively used IT since 1995. The three major impediments (the steep learning curve, difficulty in assessing success, and questions of applicability toward professional advancement) are discussed and some tentative solutions suggested. (Author/MES)

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When Good Intentions Are Not Enough: Motivating Faculty "Ownership" of IT Initiatives

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Abstract

This paper analyzes impediments to implementation of instructional technology initiatives as seen by a faculty member who has actively used IT since 1995. The three major impediments (the steep learning curve, difficulty in assessing success, and questions of applicability toward professional advancement) are discussed and some tentative solutions suggested.

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When Good Intentions Are Not Enough: Motivating Faculty "Ownership" of IT Initiatives

Joseph J. Hughes

1. A Man Of Constant Sorrow?

One of the greatest joys of the Coen Brothers' movie, *O Brother Where Art Thou*, is the delightful rendition of "(I Am) A Man Of Constant Sorrow" by the Soggy Bottom Boys. George Clooney's on-camera antics and Dan Tyminski's off-camera yowling go so far over the top that the sufferings of the song's hero seem ludicrous. The poor guy has been in constant sorrow all of his days; for six long years he's been in trouble; he has no friends to help him now; in case he dies upon that northern railroad, you're welcome to bury him in some deep valley. You can't help but laugh. Unless, of course, you're one of those men and women of constant sorrow who have tried to make instructional technology initiatives count toward promotion and/or tenure.

Thomas A. Marino states the problem succinctly at the beginning of his recent essay (Marino 2001):

> *"After years of incorporating information technology in classroom teaching in the belief that it helps students learn, I have been asked whether I would recommend that other faculty members do likewise. Though using information technology is a good way for faculty members to rethink their teaching methods, most often my answer is no—not for the untenured and definitely not for those thinking of becoming totally engaged in teaching and technology."*

His article concludes not with a plan of action, or even a suggestion. Rather, he raises a question many of us continue to ask ourselves:

> *"In addition, pioneers need to be rewarded for exploring the cutting edge; right now, many pioneers find that all they get is cut. But do we really have to bleed to make progress?"*

Dr. David Passmore of Penn State University ends his recent article on a more spiritual note. He believes that two of the three major impediments, resources and intellectual property issues, will be resolved over time. Not so the impediment of a faulty reward system (Passmore 2000):

> *"Removing the last impediment requires nothing less than a cleansing of the soul of the university. I, for one, always have wanted to witness a genuine religious conversion. Show me a miracle."*

Again, many of us - all of us, no doubt - would love to witness that religious conversion too. Please note that I am not bemoaning this situation. The rules of the game have always been crystal clear. It was beaten into my head all through graduate school and all through my years on tenure track that teaching - no matter how excellent - without scholarly publication was untenurable. If I wanted to pursue my dreams of teaching at the college level, I had better publish.This fact of academic life is not going to vanish any

time soon. We have all heard the stories of academics denied promotion or even tenure for paying too much attention to their teaching. Some of us have even lived the story ourselves.

Before I launch into my litany of woe, I should make clear that I am hardly a man of constant sorrow. I am a tenured full professor in a department with exceedingly modest scholarly expectations. I get paid to read and talk about dead Roman and Greek people, and write about the Roman orator-rhetorician Marcus Tullius Cicero. The students in my classes have to pay attention to whatever I want to say. I have even gotten funding to speak at technology conventions. I am, overall, a very fortunate man. But I did not enjoy my lesson about how instructional technology counts toward promotion.

2. How I Learned My Lesson

Six long years ago, I was already a tenured associate professor of classics when technology such as laser-disc multimedia, home-made compact discs, e-mail lists, videoconferencing, electronic bulletin boards and something called World Wide Web came to Southwest Missouri State University. I still enjoyed reading and talking about the dead Romans and Greeks (as I do to this day), but I admit that I had gotten a little tired of writing about them. I was ready to look into the future and to me, that meant the World Wide Web. In Fall 1995 I created web sites for my department and for the College of Arts and Letters. This was back in the bad old days when WYSIWYG was a type of toupee and if you wanted good HTML, you had to write it yourself. I mentored two other departmental webmasters through the process of creating their department websites. In Spring 1997, I created websites for several local not for profit organizations, including the local AIDS support organization and Habitat for Humanity. In Fall 1997, I created websites for my Myth telecourse and my Senior Honors Seminar. I hadn't exactly neglected my dead Romans and Greeks: I had written three articles on ancient rhetoric, one of which supported by a University research fellowship. But I had in fact shifted my focus to pedagogical technologies I found fully as exciting and as promising as Cicero found the speeches and rhetorical theory of the ancient Greeks.

My lesson was delivered early in Spring semester 1998. In compiling application for promotion to full professor, I was careful to document just how I had used the Internet to serve my students, my fellow departmental webmasters, the University community, and the Springfield community. In Spring 1998 my application was rejected by both the full professors on the departmental personnel committee and by the (former) department head, with no reference whatsoever, positive or negative, to my work with information technology. The full professors on personnel committee claimed that my research did not show "sustained" excellence, whatever that meant. The head said that I had "failed to adduce a big ticket item, such as a book, a grant, or a recital." Whatever that meant. I knew for a fact that I had published more than the full professors and the (former) department head combined, but this was apparently irrelevant. I also knew my application would receive a fair evaluation from the dean, but I also knew that I had two strikes on me, so I withdrew it while I still had some semblance of self esteem. As fellow

Classicist at another institution put it: "the road to promotion does not begin with the letters HTTP." From that time on, I have operated on a simple principle. Show me the money.

From that time on, I have not assisted any University entity with its Internet or instructional technology needs unless satisfactory compensation was stipulated in advance and in writing. In the spring of 2000 the personnel committee and department head ruled favorably on my promotion to full professor. This time around, both the full professors on personnel committee and the (former) department head had lots of nice things to say about my wonderful work with information technology, all of which meant absolutely nothing to me. I got the promotion I wanted and if the MCL department wants instructional technology work from me, it still has to show me the money.

3. Communication Breakdown

In my admittedly jaundiced viewpoint, colleges and universities face three major obstacles in bringing together teaching and instructional technology. I would like to take them in order. First, **the learning curve** for instructional technology is still rather intimidating. Second, the benefits of successfully incorporating instructional technology are difficult to quantify effectively. Third and worst, the applicability of incorporating instructional technology toward tenure and/or promotion remains highly dubious thanks to a communication breakdown between the constituencies involved in the tenure and promotion process.

a. The Learning Curve

First, the learning curve. Although technologies such as web publishing (FrontPage), courseware (Blackboard), and multimedia development (iMovie 2) have become far more user friendly with time, they are still daunting to learn, much less master. The days when interested SMSU faculty members acquired their own software and taught themselves how to use it are gone, thanks to the technical training provided by the Office of Instructional Technology and by Continuing Education. The folks who provide technical training are good, knowledgeable, hard-working people who take their job very seriously.

But workshops and short courses and technology expositions are in themselves not enough. I have learned over six years of helping colleagues work with various technologies that a doctorate does not equal instant mastery. Faculty members who want to work with instructional technology have to put up with long hours of trial, error, and error, just like any other student does. Inevitably the faculty member winds up sitting in front of a computer, faced with a program that just won't work, a bushel basket full of burning questions, and a splitting headache. I know because I've been there. Frequently. When our students hit the wall, it is our job as teachers to come to the rescue, with regular one-to-one contact, reassurance, and above all, the feeling of safety which

comes from knowing someone is looking out for you.. The technical training folks can not be everywhere on campus simultaneously.

Where is the safety net? Just about every hallway, or every department at least, contains a kind and patient soul who can help his or her colleagues put page numbers on a Word document, install a gradebook program, or download an attachment with Outlook. Faculty members who can walk their colleagues through FrontPage XP, or Blackboard, or WS FTP, or iMovie 2 are far more rare. They may be busy torturing themselves with newer and more promising technologies. There is also the chance that their kindness and patience has worn out, or has been beaten out of them. If they are to be expected to help, they have every right to expect they will be shown the money.

b. Assessing Instructional Technology

Let's assume that a hypothetical professor completes an instructional technology project. It's time for the first stage of assessment: field testing. The technique is simple, and doesn't require much else besides time. Lots and lots of time. Basically, field testing consists of having users of all possible skill levels use the instructional technology project over and over again on every possible platform - and then responding to the inevitable barrage of problems and complaints. This requires considerable powers of persuasion (remember, not everyone is as interested in your project as you are), a thick skin, and the willingness to go back under the hood, as it were, and tinker with your project until you finally get it right.

Just to give you one example of how important this is, the (former) department head once showed me a Powerpoint presentation she had worked very hard to create for the class she taught. Although it was very graphic intensive, and took forever to download even over the campus backbone, it worked just fine on my Windows 98 machine when I used the latest version of Microsoft Explorer. When I tried to watch the presentation with Netscape, I got nothing but gibberish. When I tried to watch the presentation on my Macintosh G3, the Mac immediately crashed. To anyone without a Windows machine or without the latest version of MS Explorer - or, heaven help them, Macintosh users, or a Netscape user, or someone dialing in via a modem connection - the Powerpoint presentation would be nothing but gibberish even if it didn't crash the computer at once. What could I say? I had neither the time nor, frankly, the inclination to be of any assistance. How many potentially useful applications of instructional technology fall through the cracks at precisely this point in the process?

Let's say, though, that the project finally works. The second stage of assessment is when the hypothetical professor tries to convince his or her department head and personnel committee that it enhances student learning. This presumes that the department head and the personnel

committee have the technical knowledge and/or intellectual energy to evaluate the project. In my experience, this is presuming too much.

Or perhaps the hypothetical professor wants to apply for some sort of grant. Unless he or she is just trying to cadge some time off or a few extra bucks, he or she must furnish definite proof that the project actually does what it claims to do. Furnishing definite proof requires a certain amount of scientific technique that I, for one, don't possess. My academic specialty consists of examining two thousand year old speeches for references to popular entertainments and discussing their social and rhetorical significance. I'm not interested in learning how to wield "base line data" to justify what I do (or try to do) with instructional technology. And even if I were, I wouldn't have the time to deploy my new statistical wizardry. I would rather be pushing the envelope.
Fortunately, I have tenure and I have been promoted as far as I will ever be promoted. I have acquired the luxury of pushing the envelope with instructional technology on my own terms. How many users of instructional technology fall through the cracks at this point?

c. Professional Advancement

Finally, for the really important part - professional advancement. In other words, how does one prove to the department personnel committee, the department head, the college dean, the Vice President for Academic Affairs, the University President, and the Board of Governors that one's application of instructional technology actually counts toward tenure and/or promotion?

Where I am employed, there is no reason to blame the Board of Governors, the central administration, or the college dean. The Board of Governors's decision is the legally binding one, but the Board always accepts the President's recommendations on personnel matters. The President, in turn, makes his recommendation in conjunction with the Vice President for Academic Affairs. In my admittedly limited knowledge, our Dean very seldom overrules the recommendations coming forth from the department level. Much as it gripes me, as a faculty member, to say it – the difficulty of applying instructional technology toward tenure and promotion is not the administration's fault.

In fact, the SMSU Office of Academic Affairs is on record as SMSU's earliest and most vocal proponent of incorporating instructional technology. In a memo of 14 November 1997, the VPAA had these instructions for departments in the process of revising their tenure and promotion documents:

> *It is important that each department's rewards system, including promotion and tenure, recognize and support university and departmental initiatives in general education (including capstone courses), honors, use of technology, advising, and public affairs.*

To this day, I find this memo's emphasis on instructional technology remarkably prescient; at the time, it was positively inspiring. Professionally, however, it led me somewhat astray. Two weeks after this memo's appearance, I turned in the materials for my first attempt at promotion to full professor and learned my lesson about just how big a communication breakdown could become.

Four years afterwards, instructional technology appears in the SMSU Faculty Handbook as a form of "scholarship of teaching," as part of the following list:

- *Scholarly presentations to campus-based or community groups*
- *Critiquing one's own students or colleagues, or consulting with community organizations*
- *Designing and refining media of expression*
- *Improving the effectiveness of one's own teaching through seeking and using peer and student feedback*
- *Assessing effectiveness of new learning technologies for teaching one's own courses*
- *Preparing, compiling, and disseminating custom texts, reading packages, and/or ancillary materials for one's own courses*
- *Successful grant applications for developing or enhancing one's own courses.*

This is entirely to the administration's credit. Unfortunately, this endorsement does not go as far as it could or should. For six long years, SMSU's academic units have been wrestling to incorporate the ubiquitous "Boyer taxonomy" of scholarship into their tenure and promotion documents. Visionary and fruitful as Boyer's work has proven to be for redefining academic roles, his taxonomy can be almost as tough to conceptualize as it is to implement, especially when it comes to the application of instructional technology (Lowry and Hansen 2001).

At present, the *SMSU Faculty Handbook* (section 2.3.1.2.1) recognizes Boyer's four categories of scholarship: the scholarship of discovery, of integration, of application, and of teaching. Each of these four categories is termed "an essential element of the University mission." Concerning each of first three categories - those of discovery, of integration, and of application - the Faculty Handbook further states: "Evidence of performance in this field is valued both for tenure and for promotion." In stark contrast, the scholarship of teaching's value "alone, is not sufficient for tenure and for promotions." Apparently, the scholarship of teaching consists of developing and tweaking one's personal teaching techniques... something expected of all full-time faculty at SMSU. A footnote appended to this description suggests that the scholarship of teaching, if applied outside of one's own classroom, may carry the same value as the other categories of scholarship:

> *(NOTE: Activities such as developing or assessing curricula for a larger audience than one's own students, developing educational resources for use by other educators, observing and analyzing student behaviors and/or student-teacher interactions outside of*

one's own classroom, and assessing effectiveness of new educational methods or technologies outside of one's own classroom may qualify as scholarship of discovery, scholarship of integration, or scholarship of application.)

This attempt at being inclusive is well intentioned, but only adds to the communication breakdown. The innovative use of instructional technology may be conducive to promotion and/or tenure - or it may not. Ultimately, the *Faculty Handbook's* answer to the question "do instructional technology initiatives count?" is "no, except for those instances in which it does."

Given the Faculty Handbook's vagueness on the worth of the "scholarship of teaching," it's not surprising that college and departmental documents can be similarly vague on how instructional technology ought to count toward tenure and promotion. At SMSU, it's been clear since 1997 that the central administration has a vital interest in instructional technology initiatives, but the administration is not interested (nor should it be) in micromanaging the creation of departmental personnel documents. They can't help us make our case. And if you're trying make the case for rewarding instructional technology initiatives to senior colleagues who still can't figure out how to send or open an e-mail attachment, you likely have no friends to help you now.

Chapter 4: Moving The Project Forward

Seen in the light of these stumbling blocks, motivating faculty "ownership" of instructional technology initiatives appears to be a daunting prospect. Even a true visionary like Steven W. Gilbert, founder and president of the TLT Group, wrestles (Gilbert 2001) with the question "why bother?" But I'm not going to give in that easily. I have already invested fifteen years of my professional life in teaching at this university, with at least (God willing) another quarter-century ahead of me. I believe in instructional technology's boundless potential for improving our efforts to produce educated people. And finally, I must admit that I have, on occasion, been shown the money. So here are a few suggestions for moving the project forward.

To my mind, the best tool for **combatting the learning curve** is peer support from faculty colleagues. Tech support personnel are invariably knowledgeable and willing to help. Formal tech support activities such as workshops or online guides are plentiful and helpful. Anyone who can attain a graduate degree in his or her discipline and keep a job teaching at the college level is certainly intelligent enough to learn how to incorporate instructional technology into his or her teaching. But statements like this only produce pressure, and ultimately, resistance. In six long years of mentoring interested colleagues, I have spent far more time cheerleading than I have teaching. And the cost has proven far less than prohibitive. As a colleague and friend, who is now my department head, has observed (Kernen

2001): "Dr. Hughes' help can still be enlisted with the mere smell of coffee which will inevitably lure him to my office."

The question of **assessing applications of instructional technology** remains the most puzzling. In my experience, university assessment entities are already busy enough without venturing into this new and uncharted sea. The MERLOT (Multimedia Educational Resource for Learning and Online Teaching) project at www.merlot.org provides, among other things, peer review of instructional technology projects: its promise is immense, but will take a long time to become useful to rank and file faculty members. A more immediately helpful approach is frequent service on personnel committees, internal grants committees and/or faculty rewards committees. Even if one cannot immediately press his or her own case, one can help establish useful precedents for future users of instructional technology. Writing letters on behalf of colleagues who have worked with instructional technology is another useful tool: having received one such encomium from a colleague in another department, I can also testify to its motivational effect.

I would mention two ways of helping make instructional technology more conducive toward **professional advancement**. Anecdotal evidence indicates that administration is demanding greater accountability from faculty members. At SMSU, we now have annual meetings with the department head to review the past year and establish goals for the year ahead. These meetings are beginning to carry the weight of a contract. This is an excellent opportunity for faculty to ask for support and recognition and an excellent opportunity for department heads to work toward granting it. Another way of approaching the problem is through the revision of departmental personnel documents and/or guidelines for tenure and promotion. These documents are in a continual state of flux, and nobody in their right mind (at least in my department) wants anything to do with them. A leadership role on a committee tasked with revising or rewriting them may well become a bully pulpit for advancing the case of appropriate rewards for the use of instructional technology.

5. These Things Take Time

The hero of "(I Am) A Man Of Constant Sorrow" concludes his litany of woe on a surprisingly hopeful note: the promise that he will meet his beloved on God's golden shore. I'm not expecting to see that golden shore any more than I expect to see the religious conversion that Professor Passmore calls for. But I hope that I have offered some useful suggestions for stopping, at least to some extent, the bleeding Professor Marino has mentioned and from which we have all (to some extent) suffered. I do believe in a day when faculty who incorporate instructional technology into our teaching will look back and laugh. But I also know these things take time.

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